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## FADS OF MEDICAL MEN.

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FROM time to time some form of treatment for disease or some medicine becomes suddenly popular. Physicians of repute give their testimony and record their belief in the new specific, and the patients who have been benefited manifest that strange enthusiasm to get others into trying their remedy which is so marked a characteristic of the average man and woman. The newspapers find out the latest craze and reporters become learned in many long words technically descriptive of various parts of the body or of the action on these of the new treatment. For a time he who reads or listens to the talk of others would believe the elixir has been found at last, that elixir, of which Pythagoras dreamed and which Lord Bacon thought might exist—the wonderful cure-all which is to vanquish every disease; and then, within six months, a year, two years at most, the new remedy has been forgotten or has sunk into a modest place in the pharmacopœia and the new treatment is old and of small respect. The part which medical men play in puffing these fads into prominence and repute is a most important one. Without their countenance and indorsement nothing could be done. That they so countenance and indorse them may be attributed to several causes, some inherent in medical science, others reflecting the highest praise on the physicians themselves, and again others which may only be condemned.

First and foremost of these must be reckoned the enormous number of causes which are behind any disease. It would seem to be simple enough to attribute the fever which ordinarily follows the fracture of a leg to the irritation which is set up in the limb by the accident, yet in point of fact, that fever is not seldom the result of the sympathetic disturbance of nerve centres, as, for example, those of the stomach, and in treating it it becomes necessary to take these into consideration. I have selected this

illustration because the results of such an accident as the fracture of a leg would appear to be of all things the simplest to diagnose. When we approach such ailments as nervous diseases we find ourselves literally wandering in a maze through which there is no path. It is commonly enough known, even by those who have not studied medicine, that, while each disease shows certain symptoms common to each recurrence of it, each case must be treated separately and allowance made for many things peculiar to the patient. Among these are his or her occupation in life, habits, food, constitution or stamina, previous ailments, and, above all, heredity or those tendencies which have come from his parents. Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes in "*Elsie Venner*" makes the old family physician refer to the knowledge he has gained, during many years of practice, of the hereditary constitutions of his patients, and the doctor adds that no school of science, no medical education, can give this knowledge to his young competitors. All this is true, wonderfully true; and it is the lack of just this knowledge of the past which makes some cases of disease so terribly puzzling and which makes each case individual in itself.

It is this individuality of cases, this fact that to one patient we must give a teaspoonful of medicine, while the next will take two, that is at the basis of the ultimate failure of all "cure-alls." And, oddly enough, it is this very individuality of cases, bringing with it to the physician so many hours of anxious thought, that makes him reach out and welcome the new treatment. He is so terribly anxious to relieve his patients, to do them good, that in the blind maze of uncertainty in which he finds himself, he hails with delight anything that promises hopefully. The practice of medicine might be defined, not unfairly, as a succession of conundrums presented for solution, with death to the patient as the penalty for failure. Who then may blame the physician for welcoming that which calls itself the key? It is the fashion to blame physicians for their ready adherence to the new, but it is an unjust fashion when the facts are considered.

There have been many medical fads, some of which have been almost funny to any one who looks at them scientifically, while others have had vitality enough to retain a place, shorn, however, of the vogue they once had. The latter are in the majority, for the greater number of these fads have really had some good in them and have been most excellent for some diseases.

About the first medical fad I can remember was the water cure. I have never personally gone through nor seen this treatment, but I know it from my reading. The patients who went to the water-cure establishments were obliged to live the most absolutely regular and simple lives. They took plenty of sleep, lots of exercise ; they lived on the simplest but very nutritious food ; they were forced to so exist as to give the recuperative powers of nature the fullest opportunity. Naturally, those who were worn out by work or the demands of society, whose digestion was ruined by rich food, who had, in short, lived in defiance of every law of hygiene, derived great relief and permanent benefit. True, the health conditions of the life were accompanied for the patients by an everlasting round of washing themselves in various ways, and means were taken to stimulate the excretory glands of the skin to the utmost through the use of the wet packs. Cleanliness is certainly good, and the latter helped nature to rid the body of the waste. As for the rest of the water treatment, the douches, the baths, the massage that accompanied them ; no harm was done by them as a general rule. The real value of the hydropathic treatment is now thoroughly recognized ; it is capitally well designed to give a person a chance to rest and to build himself up ; then, too, it is a stimulant and tonic to the nervous system, but it is not the cure-all it was once believed to be. It was, of course, run into the ground ; patients went to the establishments whose cases were far beyond the treatment of rest, exercise and plain food, and so it fell into disrepute by failure. Yet in some cases it is as valuable to-day as ever.

Perhaps the queerest fad of modern times was that which placed the elixir of life in blue glass. That the color of light has certain influences on life, especially life of the lower sort, as in plants, is a fact. Plant life is undoubtedly affected by the color of light, and animal life needs light. If an animal be deprived of light it will become what is called anæmic, but exactly why, no one knows. Reasoning from the observed effects of blue light on some plants, the inventor of the fad prescribed baths under blue glass for all. You were to strip yourself, I remember, and lie down under the blue glass for many hours each day. And the queerest thing about the whole business was the fact that some of the devotees not only declared themselves benefited by the treatment so long as they believed in it, but were unquestionably so benefited. I

say, so long as they believed in it, for I do not think there are many, if in fact there be one, who bathes in blue light now.

The effect of belief or faith, the effect of mind over the matter of the body, is one of the mysterious things in all science. It is unquestionably a fact, demonstrated beyond all dispute by thousands of observed cases. Long before it was admitted or studied by scientific men it was commonly known, and that, too, among races of little mental development. Who shall say when the first enemy prayed his enemy to death among the natives of the South Sea Islands ? Who can tell when the first Obi man "put cunjer" on him who had defied him ? The religious mysteries of vanished nations are full of recorded occurrences that may only be explained by this extraordinary power.

Let me state the fact as it has been seen. It appears to be possible for the mind of a man or woman to cause physical changes to take place in the body of that man or woman, nor have we at the present time any data showing the limit of this power. Here is a case recorded in print, as apt an illustration as may be asked : Charcot, of Paris, took a patient in the hypnotic state, placed on his skin a piece of common brown paper wet with water, and then told his patient he had put a blister on him. At the end of an hour the paper was removed, and there was a blister in its first stage—the inflamed edges, the minute cells full of serum, the partly detached skin. Now, in practice, we class a blister among those things which act mechanically—that is, by no exercise of will on the part of the patient can we suppose a fly-blister to be estopped in its action. Yet in this case the action of the blister was imitated by the action of the patient's mind. It is impossible to express in words the amazement one feels when one hears of such an experiment.

The scientific study of this strange power has revealed it to be subjective and not objective. Translating these words so dear to the German metaphysicians, we know the mind can only act on its own body, never on the body of another. If I desire, for example, to produce the blister on the body of another, I can only do this by in some way causing the mind of that other to produce it. If that other be in the hypnotic state—for purposes of this explanation this means that that other has surrendered all free will and that his mind will work under the suggestion of my will—then I suggest the

blister to him, use the paper or anything else to deceive him, and his mind does the rest. I should, perhaps, say at this point that I am speaking of hypnotism at second hand and not from my own observation. The knowledge that this power is subjective in the patient and not objective from the operator was not had prior to the time that it was scientifically studied. In the mysteries, in the work of the Obi man, it always appears as objective, and doubtless those who observed its workings honestly believed it to be so.

From what I have said, something of the remedial effect of faith on disease may be imagined. If you could persuade people to believe that the application of a cat's tail to a rheumatic limb would cure them, it is beyond a question that such an application would do them good. On this, then, rests many of the stranger fads of practice, such as the Faith Cure, directly and indirectly, the Grape Cure, the Milk Cure, the Water Cure, the Rest Cure and, in fact, nearly all of the cure-alls. As we have seen in discussing the water cure, some of these have distinctly hygienic conditions which enable nature to do her best for the patient, but added to these, and largely aiding them, comes the belief which brings about the curative influence of the mind on the body.

It may be asked whether I am not a believer in the Faith Cure. Unquestionably I am, as every physician is forced to be before he has been many years in practice. But I believe in the Faith Cure only when it is subjective ; I have not a grain of belief in it when it becomes objective. And more than that, I believe in it only as an aid, as one of the remedial agents which help the patient ; I have no belief in it alone except in a small class of nervous diseases. It is perfectly well known that the physician who is most successful with a patient is he in whom that patient has the most confidence, and it is equally a fact that the belief which the majority of patients have in the power of physicians to help them is one of the most important, if not the most important, factor in the successful practice of medicine. What are these but variants of the Faith Cure ? Every physician has seen cases in which the patient was convinced he or she would die, and this frame of mind is of all the most dreaded by medical men, for when it appears drugs lose much, if not all, of their power to aid. But, while we recognize all these things, we can yet condemn

and laugh at the practice of the Faith Curists, for they declare their power to be objective and they claim for it an extent and range which is absurd.

Such alleged discoveries as the cure of cancer by the use of a certain plant, and the elixir of life invented by Brown-Sequard must be classed among the fungoid growths which mark the decay of the scientific mind. A word must be said, however, for the exaggerated estimates frequently given to new discoveries which are in themselves of value, and it is not unfair to rank these exaggerations among the fads of medical men. When a new drug or new medicine is brought to the attention of the profession it is rarely understood fully. Before it may be properly classed a thousand experiments must be made with it, and during these experiments the good derived from it is almost invariably overestimated. This is owing to the law which governs the effects of all medicines. For under this law every medicine does good and evil. As the good effects are often immediate, while the evil take time to show themselves, it naturally follows that they of the more hopeful sort see the former only. A striking instance of this is to be found in chloral, which, when first discovered, was hailed as a sedative having no evil in its train. We know now the chloral habit to be as awful in its effects as the morphine habit. The lesson this teaches is obvious ; a medicine must be thoroughly tried before we can say what it is worth, nor should we allow ourselves to join the faddists who hail the coming of the cure-all at last.

Every new treatment, every fresh drug, every medicine that is discovered is one more drop from the great ocean of knowledge segregated that we may study it for the benefit of mankind. In it there is good and evil, but if we approach it with reverent earnestness and study that we may know, we can assure ourselves that we are helping on the great science to which we have devoted our lives. This is reward enough, and this reward shall surely come to the physician who will work. The amelioration of the physical ills of man is the end and aim of our most noble profession, and it is pleasant to remember that even the enthusiasts aid in the great work by their devotion to their fads.

CYRUS EDSON.